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Pre-study on the role of higher education institutions as providers of continuous professional learning and adult education

Directorate-General for Education and Culture

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents results of the pre-study on the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) as providers of continuous professional learning and adult education. It aimed to offer a review of the current volume of adult learning in HEIs and raise a limited number of key questions in this area. This small pre-study has been based on an initial review of the literature and the analysis of international databases that offer comparable data on this topic.

It is important to note that there are aspects that highlight the importance of the role of HEIs in the provision of adult learning beyond direct provision, that are not included in this study. Besides this direct provision role, HEIs also certify learning acquired elsewhere (at least in some countries), are producers of adult education content (which can be delivered within or outside HEIs), provide training (e.g. in Portugal specialised training programmes have been set up addressing the pedagogical teams in the context of the 'New Opportunities' initiative) and undertake research in adult education. Several of these aspects are covered in major recent studies such as the ALPINE project financed by the EU¹, a UNESCO report on the development of Adult Learning² and a book edited by Hudson and Gage on teacher education in Europe³.

The concept of adult learning varies from country to country. Thus, for instance, in England and Wales, although an adult learner is theoretically anyone, at whatever age, who returns to learning after completing compulsory education, the term is more usually understood as anyone over the age of 19 years⁴. The term 'mature student' is used for those undergraduates who are 21 or older. In contrast, in Belgium and Spain the age boundary for adult students is 25. In Sweden, the term 'adult student' is less familiar because many people often choose to participate in HE in their mid twenties. Similarly, in Germany, the traditional length of degree courses meant that many undergraduates were older than in other countries⁵. Further differences exist between adults who re-enter higher education with a prior major break in their education and those who have not and between those who have already acquired a HE qualification and those who have not⁶. Differences between the life experiences of male and female adult students are also topical. In this pre-study the term adult learner refers to all people aged 30 years or older. The piece excludes 'corporate universities'⁷, created by industry or large transnational corporations, that provide training to adults.

The report is organised in three further sections. The next section provides a rapid review of the literature on adult participation in HE. Section three gives an overview of the role of HEIs as providers of HE in terms of participation, qualifications delivered and the implications for HE financing. The final section concludes by presenting a limited number of questions that deserve further exploration.

¹ Research voor Beleid (2008) *Adult Learning Professions in Europe*. Final report to the European Commission.

² UNESCO (2009) *The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional synthesis report*. UNESCO, Paris.

³ Hudson, B. and Gage, P. (eds.) (2008) *Teacher education policy in Europe: a voice of higher education institutions*. Umea, University of Umea.

⁴ Powell, R., Smith, R. and Reakes, A. (2003) *Defining common issues across Europe for adult education*. Slough, National Foundation for Educational Research.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Schuetze, H. G. and Slowey, M. (2002) 'Participation and exclusion: a comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education' *Higher Education*, vol.44, pp. 309-327.

⁷ Eurich, N. (1985) *Corporate Classrooms*, Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

2 WIDENING HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION TO ADULT LEARNERS

2.1 Introduction

Widening participation to adult learners requires the alignment of the interests, incentives and actions of different stakeholders. In the context of this research these include the European Commission, Member States, HEIs and individuals. This section covers briefly the work of the European Union in this area before it moves on to review the motivation and barriers faced by adult students and measures implemented at different levels to widen participation to adult learners. The section shows that adult participation in HE is a relatively neglected research area, although differences exist: while the motivation and barriers faced by adult students have been well explored there is much less research on the benefits for HEIs to open up to adult students.

2.2 The European Union

The European Union has had a long-standing interest in widening participation in HE. The 1991 Memorandum on Higher Education⁸ already called HEIs to support an expanding knowledge-based economy, to contribute to the single labour market for highly qualified personnel and to widen access to higher qualifications. It argued that HEIs should offer continuing opportunities for updating and renewal, form partnerships with economic life and a shift in policy terms in the balance of attention, investment and organization as between initial and continuing education with an increased importance being attached to the latter⁹. It questioned existing admission policies that did not recognise knowledge and experience gained in the labour market and the lack of provision of preparatory courses. The justification for these demands was initially largely economic, given the lack of competence of the EU in this area, but moved to include wider social concerns related to the integration and inclusion of adults later on¹⁰.

The preamble of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty affirmed the determination of Heads of the State to promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for people through wide access to education and continuous updating. The Lisbon Agenda reiterated the importance of achieving high skills for economic development and social inclusion through investment in education and training. This was reflected in the 2001 Communication 'Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality', which stressed the importance of lifelong learning for all. More recently the 2006 Commission Communication on 'Adult learning: it is never too late to learn' and the accompanying action plan underlined the importance of adult learning as part of the lifelong learning mix, in particular at a time when the average age of participants in the labour market is increasing¹¹. Since then the relevance of these actions has increased given the economic crisis and the need for training and retraining of adults that have lost their jobs during the recession and the clear weaknesses of growth

⁸ Commission of the European Communities (1991) Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community (Brussels, Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training, Youth).

⁹ Davies, P. (2003) 'Widening participation and the European Union: direct action –indirect policy?' *European Journal of Education*, vol.38(1), pp. 99-116.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ European Commission (2007) *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Action Plan on Adult Learning*. Brussels 27.09.2007.

models that relied too heavily on construction and other low skilled sectors. In spite of this, progress on the benchmark for adult learning participation has been low.

The EU has thus firmly established the importance of lifelong learning in its policy agenda. The action plan on adult learning, which aims to implement the main messages from the communication, provided priority areas for action specifically in relation to adult learners' access to HE. These related to removing barriers to access by working on:

- enhancing information advice and guidance;
- enhancing validation of non-formal and informal learning in HE; and
- demand-driven financial mechanisms (individual learning accounts, tax measures and publicly awarded or publicly guaranteed loans).

Regarding the type of opening up of HEIs, the action plan underlines the importance of facilitating 'one level up' as there is a risk that participation in HE benefits only those adults who already have high qualification levels. The EU has low levels of legal competence in these areas and needs to ensure collaboration with Member States through the Open Method of Coordination.

2.3 Widening participation actions

Member States vary considerably regarding their levels of adult learners' access to HE –see section 3 of this report- as well as the measures that they have in place to facilitate access. This section first provides a brief assessment of the contributions adult students can make to HE teaching, learning and research, which is followed by an overview of the rationale to widen access in adult participation in HE as well as a review of different types of measures implemented to that aim and the kind of HEI that would derive from these actions.

It is worthwhile to mention that, despite the increasing importance of adult education participation in HE, widening participation to adults is an area that has received comparatively little attention by educational researchers¹². In the context of EU-funded research, a recent review of adult education trends and issues provided little specific reflection about adult learners' participation in HE¹³. Within the aspects that have received greater attention are the profile of adult students, their motivations to participate in HE and the barriers and difficulties they face. Some, limited, research is also available in relation to the effects that adult student participation has in the classroom. There is, however, a strong lack of systematic research on the reasons why HEIs should be interested in widen HE participation to adults.

2.3.1.1 *Mature students: breaking down stereotypes*

The standard vision regarding adult learners has been based on the unfounded stereotype that adults are less effective learners simply because they are adults¹⁴. This has often been linked to loss of memory and lack of the necessary flexibility to adopt new perspectives. This, however, has largely been refuted by research.

¹² UNESCO (2009) *The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional synthesis report*. UNESCO, Paris. Donaldson, J. F. and Townsend, B. K. (2007)

'Higher education journals' discourse about adult undergraduate students' *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol.78(1), pp. 27-50. Pascarella, E. T. and Terenzini, P. T. (2005) *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

¹³ EAEA (2006) *Adult education trends and issues in Europe*. Final report to the European Commission.

¹⁴ Kasworm, C. E. (1990) 'Adult undergraduates in Higher Education: A review of past research perspectives' *Review of Educational Research*, vol.60(3), pp. 345-372.

Research suggests that adult students can make a valuable contribution in **teaching and learning**, and more specifically in class discussions. Academic staff often remark that adult students perform better than younger students and that they have a positive influence on the courses they read, in particular in tutorial contributions¹⁵. They can also be more adept at examining and exploring their prior experience in order to make sense of new information and new situations, and at a 'meaning' instead of a 'surface' approach to studying. The fact that their abilities are at least as high as those of younger students is reflected in the fact that their results are not worse (in terms of completion rates and marks obtained) than those of other students¹⁶. The problem is that even if adults are not less effective learners, they may believe they are and act upon shared stereotypes¹⁷, and this may push them away from HE.

Mature students can also provide important contributions in **research**. Thanks to their professional experience they can often produce more practically relevant research projects and generate applied knowledge of the kind that can stimulate economic development. The European Universities' Charter on Lifelong learning¹⁸ recognises the important contribution that a diversified student body will make to the development of a culture of success and innovation in the institution and wider society.

On the whole, however, there is very little research on how to stimulate HEIs to reach out to adults. There is also very little research on the potential benefits that adult students can bring to HEIs¹⁹.

2.3.1.2 **Rationale**

Economic rationales have been put forward as a justification for the interest of countries, HEIs and individuals to participate in HE. For countries, higher participation of adults in HE would increase employment levels and reduce welfare spending; for HEIs adult education can provide a profitable market²⁰; for individuals participation in HE will reduce the likelihood of unemployment and increase future income streams.

However, the fact that adult participation in HE is below the desired levels and does not have a strong profile in the mission of HEIs –cf. below- raises questions on the extent to which the outlined economic rationales are accurate or can provide the "full story". First, for countries, investment in the HE of 18 year olds can be seen as a sounder investment than investment in adults HE as these have a fewer working years left before retirement. Similarly, with higher levels of participation in HE and increasing production of HE graduates globally (in particular from China and India), and increasing levels of wage inequality, the economic returns to participants become

¹⁵ Boon, P. K. (1980) 'Attitudes of staff towards mature students' In Hore, T. and West, L. H. T. (eds.) *Mature students in Australian higher education*, pp.122-139. Clayton, Monash University, Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit.

¹⁶ Richardson, J. T. E. and King, E. (1998) 'Adult students in higher education: Burden or Boon?' *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol.69(1), pp. 65-88.

¹⁷ Ross, M. (1989) 'Relation of implicit theories to the construction of personal histories' *Psychological Review*, vol 96, 341-357.

¹⁸ EUA (2008) European Universities' charter on lifelong learning. EUA.

¹⁹ Kokosalakis, N. (2001) *Lifelong Learning: the implications for universities in the EU*. Final report to the European Commission. Athens, Panteios University. Marshall H. and Nicholson, P. (1991) 'Why choose psychology? Mature and other students' accounts at graduation'. In Radford, J. (ed.) *The choice of psychology* Group of Teachers of Psychology Occasional Paper, No.12 (pp.22-29). Leicester, British Psychological Society. UNESCO (2009) *The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional synthesis report*. UNESCO, Paris.

²⁰ Zemsky, R. (1998) 'Labour markets and education restructuring' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 559 pp.77-90.

more uncertain²¹. Returns to their investment in education are also lower on the whole for adults as age increases –given that labour market participation length is lower. Finally, although it could be said that HEIs have been encouraged to pursue the expansion agendas for reasons of institutional growth and survival²², for some HEIs teaching adult students may not be considered profitable, or may be seen as moving them away from their ‘core mission’. There are often forgotten financial implications in having adult students, as they are often enrolled in part-time courses. Having large numbers of part-time students requires, amongst other things, much greater administration spending and also results in greater uncertainty for HEIs about next years’ enrolment levels.

Besides economic returns other factors (social factors, prestige, etc.) affect the decisions of stakeholders. For HEIs, having adult students enrolled who are interested in enrolling in getting new knowledge but are not interested in the assessment and certification of that knowledge may be problematic as can lead to high ‘drop-out’ rates. This reflects poorly in the completion rates of HEI with high numbers of mature students, which can have both financial (as government funding may be lower for students who do not complete their course) and reputational implications. In terms of reputational implications, it is important to note that the intake of 18 year olds and their upper secondary grades and the proportion of international students, are elements that are often taken into account in national and international²³ University rankings whereas mature students participation do not and therefore provide lower reputational returns in these leagues.

2.3.1.3 **Actions**

HE has somehow catered for the relatively low share of adults interested in HE participation for a long time. Some courses have been designed with adults in mind, have a long tradition and are very well established. This is the case of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) qualification, which is around 100 old and is highly attractive to HEIs given the fees they can command for such courses. Open Universities were set up in the UK, Spain in the late 1960s and early 1970s and later in other countries (e.g. Netherlands in the 1980s) mainly to cater for adult students, who required flexibility to study at home in their own time and at their own pace. Around that time, Universities of the Third age were established in France, and the model spread to other European and indeed non-European countries, which provide special programmes for the elderly²⁴. Private education providers also entered the adult education sector at the high-skill level, in particular for highly specialised occupational sectors²⁵.

Yet the expansion of adult education in HEIs appeared only relatively recently. The OECD²⁶ thus talked of a silent enrolment explosion of adult HE participation in the 1980s. Variations regarding this explosion exist across countries, depending on the adult learning landscape. Thus, in some countries such as the US, the expansion of

²¹ Brown, P, Lauder, H. and Ashton, D. (2010) *The global auction. The broken promises of education, jobs and incomes*. New York, Oxford University Press.

²² Archer, L., Hutchings, M. and Ross, A. (2003) *Introduction in Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of exclusion and inclusion*. London, Routledge.

²³ Saisana, M. and D'Hombres, B. (2008) *Higher Education rankings: robustness issues and critical assessment*. JRC Scientific and Technical Reports.

²⁴ Research voor Beleid (2008) *Adult Learning Professions in Europe*. Final report to the European Commission.

²⁵ NIACE (2005) *Study on Adult Education Providers*. Final report to the European Commission. NIACE, London.

²⁶ OECD (1991) *Further Education and Training of the Labour Force in OECD Countries: Evidence and Issues*. Document SME/MAS/ED/WD(91)5. Paris: OECD.

continuing HE has been higher as it is operated on a cost-recovery or profit-making basis and there is a less developed sector of adult education outside HE than in countries such as Germany or Austria²⁷. In most countries the expansion has included both continuing professional development courses (CDP) as well as regular degree courses.

Since the 1980s, studies on access to adult education have focused on the motivation and barriers faced by adult learners. It is important to highlight that adult learners are not a homogeneous group. There is great diversity in adult learners -obvious differences relate to the experiences of males and females and those of students in different age groups²⁸- their motivations and barriers. In spite of these differences, the assumption is that they face some common challenges and that enhancing their motivation and removing the barriers they face will increase participation in adult HE, although this is, first, more difficult than it sounds and, second, the removal of barriers has not always produced the desired effects²⁹. Motivational factors for adult participation in HE have been summarised³⁰ to include:

- socio-communication improvement (e.g. to participate more in social activities, better understand the own self and others, etc.);
- family togetherness (e.g. keep up with the qualification achievement of family members; offer help in family members' work, be a family role model, etc.);
- career advancement (e.g. obtain a promotion, higher pay, greater job satisfaction, etc.);
- escape (e.g. lack of other social activities to occupy free time; loneliness, etc.); and
- personal development (e.g. desire to discover one's potential, improvement of thinking skills, etc.).

In the context of increasing levels of adult education in Europe Tuijnman³¹ raised questions on the possible potential conflicts between its economic and labour market objectives and its cultural, social and redistributive goals. Data on student motivation to enter HE is lacking, although it seems that self-development goals can be important. CEDEFOP³² enquired about motivations for lifelong learning generally. According to this study the main reasons for future learning were to achieve more personal satisfaction, increase general knowledge (31% each), do a job better (27%) and obtain a qualification (20%).

²⁷ Wolter, A. and Schuetze, H.G. (1997). 'Lebenslanges Lernen und Weiterbildung als Aufgaben der Hochschule (Lifelong learning and continuing education - a mission for higher education)', in Busch, F.W. (ed.), *Programme, Prospekte, Projekte* (Programs, Perspectives and Projects) - Festschrift für H.D. Raapke. Oldenburg: Isensee Verlag, pp. 229-266.

²⁸ Richardson, J. T. E. and King, E. (1998) 'Adult students in higher education: Burden or Boon?' *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol.69(1), pp. 65-88.

²⁹ Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L., Adnett, N. and Slack, K. (2006) *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*. Higher Education Funding Council for England.

³⁰ Yan-Fung, M. and Tsz-Man, K. (1999) 'Social-influence factors and motivations of participation in adult higher education' *Education Journal*, vol.27(2), pp. 83-102.

³¹ Tuijnman, A. C. (1992) 'The expansion of adult education and training in Europe: Trends and issues', *International Review of Education*, vol.38(6), pp. 673-692.

³² CEDEFOP (2008) *The shift to learning outcomes. Conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe*. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Regarding the barriers faced by adult students who want to continue their studies have been related to:

- lack of information;
- financial constraints;
- access problems;
- unsuitable course offer, rigid programme structures and lack of flexibility in programme delivery;
- fear of an unsatisfactory HE experience; and
- unsatisfactory support mechanisms, such as child-care, transport, etc. to deal, mainly, with their lack of time.

As we have seen, the EU action programme on Adult learning has tended to put greater emphasis on the three first aspects (information, finance and access requirements), and less so on the last two (the HE experience and support mechanisms). As already implied, it is important to keep in mind that these barriers will affect adult learners differently depending on their background (e.g. gender, age group, socio-economic background, initial level of schooling). For instance, whereas adult males tend to justify their drop-out from HE because mainly giving financial reasons or because that have chosen the wrong course, females tend to report lack of time or dissatisfaction with the social environment in their course as most common reasons for dropping out³³. This highlights that different groups would require a different emphasis on the above factors to maximise their participation levels.

We review these barriers, briefly, in turn below. Some recent studies have identified validation of non-formal and informal learning as the most important aspect to motivate adults to participate in HE and consequently we provide some greater detail on this topic.

Lack of information on adult learning opportunities in HE is indeed a significant problem that information, advice and guidance structures can help to address. Older learners tend to be happy to be depicted as a specific group, but they can be wary about accessing certain provision, such as counselling, which they regard as being for their younger peers³⁴. Thus some HEIs have created central coordinating offices and vice-chancellor roles that include lifelong learning amongst their responsibilities³⁵. Some HEIs hold more intense induction sessions for mature students, as they have been outside education often much longer than younger students and require greater guidance³⁶. It is also important for adult students to obtain information and advice on the availability of financial aid or the possibilities for validation of non-formal and informal learning, besides guidance on available provision³⁷.

³³ Yorke, M. (1999) *Leaving Early: Undergraduate non-completion in higher education*, London: Falmer Press.

³⁴ Thomas, L., Quinn, J., Slack, K. and Casey, L. (2002) *Student services: Effective approaches to retaining students in higher education*, Institute for Access Studies: Staffordshire University.

³⁵ Kokosalakis, N. (2001) *Lifelong Learning: the implications for universities in the EU*. Final report to the European Commission. Athens, Panteios University.

³⁶ Dodgson, R. and Bolam, H. (2002) *Student retention, support and widening participation in the North East of England*, Universities for the North East.

³⁷ KCPSE (2009) *Helping Adults succeed in postsecondary education: A policy framework*. Kentucky Council of Post-secondary Education.

However, there are other aspects related to this barrier. An important one is the lack of information and marketing messages on HEIs websites that might persuade adult learners to enrol. This suggests that HEIs do not have adult-oriented marketing strategies and often given scant attention to the decision-making needs of prospective adult learners. Web site message improvements can include designing messages that appeal to the needs and interests of adult learners; welcoming adult learners through textual content, visual displays, and ease of access to information; demonstrating how an institution will address adult learners' issues and interests; and convincing prospects that they will achieve their goals by completing their education at the institution³⁸. It is also important to note that adults can have a fixed notion of what learning is and what HE is based on their previous experience of education³⁹. 'When I was in school the teacher told us what to do and you did it' is the image of education that most adults have⁴⁰. They therefore do not take into account new developments that aim to make education more relevant to the labour market and student centred, such as the turn to learning outcomes, which is starting to develop in HE⁴¹. The extent to which adults are aware of such changes is unclear.

Financial constraints continue to be an important obstacle in the decision of adults to study, and this factor has increased in importance as the private costs of higher education have increased and recession has led to stagnant employment prospects⁴². This is more so, in particular, where sufficient mechanisms addressing liquidity constraints for those in need have not been put in place⁴³. Three main factors emerge in relation to financial constraints. First, the constraints on many financial support schemes based on age; second, gaps in many support systems for part-time and distance learning students; third, the impact of loan schemes, in particular those that do not make repayment conditional on higher income after completion of studies⁴⁴. The Commission Action Plan on Adult learning already highlighted a number of initiatives to take forward in this respect, such as the setting up of individual learning accounts, tax credits and enhancing the availability of loans. Efforts can also be made to keep tuition costs low, but even in those cases in which tuition is low/ free it must be borne in mind that the largest expense item for adult students are living expenses⁴⁵. For some sectors in high demand occupations it may be possible for HEI to work closely with local employers in the establishment of a career path that guarantees employment upon graduation; public funding has been used to that aim in some USA states⁴⁶.

Access issues are related to the impossibility for adults without an upper secondary education certificate to enroll on HE courses, or the requirement for adults to read for whole educational programmes, even in those areas in which individuals already

³⁸ Stein, D. S., Wanstreet, C. E., Saunders, C. T. Jr. and Lutz, M. L. (2009) 'The promise and the pathway: marketing higher education to adults' *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, vol.12(3).

³⁹ Wlodkowski, R. J. (1998) *Enhancing adult motivation to learn. A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

⁴⁰ Merrill, B. (2001) 'Learning and teaching in Universities: perspectives from adults learners and lecturers' *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol.6(1), pp. 5-17.

⁴¹ CEDEFOP (2008) *The shift to learning outcomes. Conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe*. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

⁴² KCPSE (2009) *Helping Adults succeed in postsecondary education: A policy framework*. Kentucky Council of Post-secondary Education.

⁴³ Moore, H. H. (2009) 'Whatever happened to learning?' *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, vol.57(1), pp. 40-41.

⁴⁴ Schuetze, H. G. and Slowey, M. (2002) 'Participation and exclusion: a comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education' *Higher Education*, vol.44, pp. 309-327.

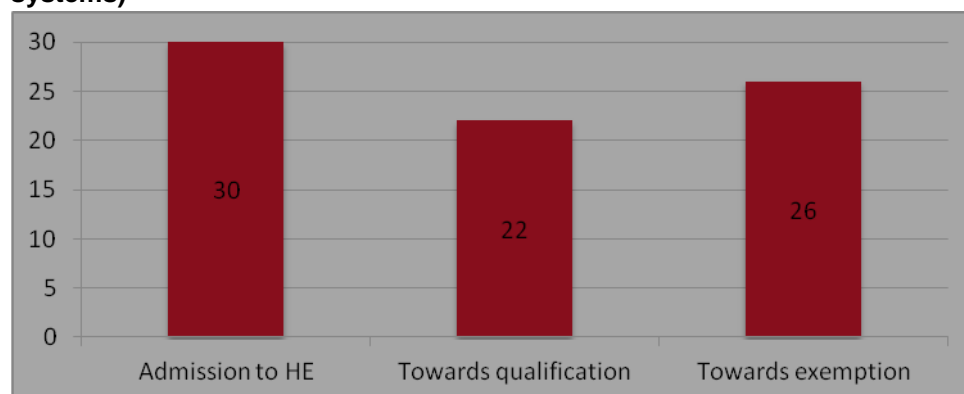
⁴⁵ Linn, D. (2009) *The pathways to advancement project: How States can expand postsecondary educational opportunities for working adults*. NGA Centre for best practices.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

have the knowledge, skills and competences expected to be gained in some units. The response to issues like these is often seen in the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Indeed, in a recent American study on what measures would increase the interest of adults in returning to higher education accreditation of prior learning came up first⁴⁷, above accelerated academic programming and financial aid. The same study notes that the availability of validation mechanisms may help to increase aspirations.

Much progress is still needed in this area. This aspect has received much political attention in the last few years, and practices in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning in HE are outlined in the 2008 European Inventory on validation on non-formal and informal learning⁴⁸ and in the forthcoming 2011 update of the Inventory. The EUA⁴⁹ has recently recognised the need to better and more widely validate prior learning. Yet, it has been noted within the context of the Bologna process stocktaking exercise, that little progress has occurred since the introduction in 2007 of an indicator on 'recognition of prior learning'⁵⁰ (RLP). The degree of development across European countries varies; however, responses from many countries suggest that there is little or no recognition of learning undertaken outside the formal education system⁵¹. Some countries, moreover, apply a restricted definition of 'prior learning' in the Bologna stocktaking, which means that only school qualifications from other institutions are recognised. So, while almost two-thirds of the Bologna countries have established procedures for the recognition of prior learning as a basis for admission to HE, fewer countries have established rules for the allocation of credits on the basis of prior learning, as shown in Chart 1. Some countries, moreover, set upper limits for the number of credits that can be allocated.

Chart 1: Nationally established procedures to assess prior learning (out of 48 systems)



Source: Bologna Stocktaking Exercise 2009. Number of countries

In many countries, institutional autonomy results in the application of nationally established procedures being left at the discretion of HEIs. As a result, even though

⁴⁷ KCPSE (2009) *Helping Adults succeed in postsecondary education: A policy framework*. Kentucky Council of Post-secondary Education.

⁴⁸ Souto-Otero, M., Hawley, J. and Nevala, A. M. (eds.) (2008) *Update of the European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. Final Report to the European Commission*. ECOTEC Research and Consulting, Birmingham.

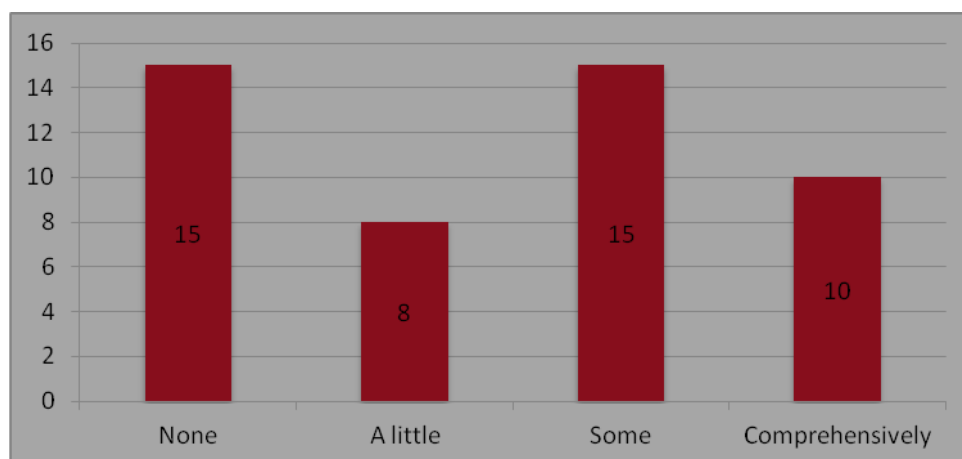
⁴⁹ EUA (2008) European Universities' charter on lifelong learning. EUA.

⁵⁰ Rauhvargers, A., Deane, C. and Pauwels, W. (2009) *Bologna process stocktaking report*. Bologna Follow-up Working Group.

⁵¹ Cf. also EUCEN (2009) *Progress on flexibility in the Bologna reform. Thematic report and recommendations to policy-makers*. Technical Report to the European Commission. EUCEN, Brussels.

the number of countries with formally approved national procedures can seem high, the extent to which these procedures are used is moderate and only in a minority of countries they are applied comprehensively, as shown in Chart 2. These figures, moreover, are likely to be exaggerated as some countries understood the concept of recognition of prior learning as the consideration of any kind of previous education for admission to the next level (e.g. assessing first cycle qualifications to go into the second cycle)⁵². Indeed RLP appears to be better developed in the non-University HE sector than in HE⁵³.

Chart 2: Extent of application of RPL procedures in practice



Source: Bologna Stocktaking Exercise 2009. Number of countries

Part of the problem could be related to financial incentives for HEIs. In systems where universities receive State funding at least partly depending on the numbers of students enrolled in a unit, there may be lower incentives for validation. This is an area, however, in which further research is needed.

Regarding the rigidity of programmes, modes of delivery and assessment, HE systems have responded to greater demand for adult HE participation partly through diversification and specialisation in post-secondary education⁵⁴. HEIs are now responding to these new demands through several strategies, such as the flexibilisation of their admission requirements and educational offer, increasing part-time provision, modularisation, e-learning and provision at non-standard hours⁵⁵. Many universities in Europe and elsewhere are also working at the post-graduate level, by enhancing their offer of professional master courses and doctorates for the purpose of highly advanced professional education and training for the new 'practitioner-researcher'⁵⁶. However, as many adult students do not primarily wish to

⁵² Rauhvargers, A., Deane, C. and Pauwels, W. (2009) *Bologna process stocktaking report*. Bologna Follow-up Working Group.

⁵³ Ibid.; Souto-Otero, M., Hawley, J. and Nevala, A. M. (eds.) (2008) *Update of the European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. Final Report to the European Commission*. ECOTEC Research and Consulting, Birmingham.

⁵⁴ Souto-Otero, M. (2007a) 'Access to post-compulsory education and training: economic, sociological and political determinants and remaining research gaps' *Comparative Education*, vol.43(4), pp. 571-586. Souto-Otero, M. (2007b) 'Further education provider specialization: international experiences and lessons for England' *Research in post-compulsory education*, vol.12(2), pp. 193-207.

⁵⁵ OECD (2003) *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult learning policies and practice*. Paris, OECD. Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L., Adnett, N. and Slack, K. (2006) *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*. Higher Education Funding Council for England.

⁵⁶ Fuwa, K. (2009) 'Is the expansion of higher education in Japan for young students only or for all? A critical analysis from a lifelong learning perspective' *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.28(4),

study towards a qualification –including those in ‘third age’ students who increasingly enrol after retirement and often also those who already possess a degree-, it is important for them to be able to access programmes, courses and institutions outside degree or other credit-earning programmes.

Accelerated programmes (e.g. evening and weekend programmes) have helped to overcome partially the constraints of time and location that adults often face in their learning⁵⁷. New kinds of degrees, such as Foundation Degrees (FD) in the UK, which are two year full-time HE courses, have been created to widen participation to people from less traditional backgrounds and provide a route into employment or full degree courses⁵⁸. Two thirds of FD students are over 21 at the time of entry. There are also increasing references to work with industry in curriculum design, although often academic institutions are reluctant to such partnerships, and companies may not be eager to interact as providing training internally enhances employee identification and fidelity⁵⁹. A comparative study of 10 countries referred to the importance of institutional governance and control in relation to these aspects⁶⁰. The extent of institutional flexibility with regard to the organisation of studies, contents of curricula and programmes influences the degree to which HEIs can cater for adult students.

Research on the **adult student experience** of HE has explored the factors that affect it, such as peer networking, student academic and social environment on campus and predictors of HE participation success⁶¹. A lack of full and equitable treatment of adults in institutional programming and development of institutional mission has been evidenced⁶². Age can become a divisive factor in many ways. Adults can experience a sense of alienation, of being outsiders and not ‘owning’ HE⁶³. Adults are also differentially located across the HE system, in particular in those HE systems that are stratified, with research-intensive universities being much more closed than teaching-led universities in the admission of adult learners, as they concentrate on a selective body of students, at least at the undergraduate level⁶⁴. This highlights a problem of equality in relation to the HE experience obtained by these students. There is some evidence that in systems that are less vertically diversified, such as in Sweden or Canada, there is greater willingness by HEIs to admit adult students in higher numbers⁶⁵.

pp. 459-471. See also Jarvis, P. (2001) ‘Lifelong learning –which ways forward for Higher Education?’ in Colardyn, D. (ed.) *Lifelong learning: which ways forward?* Bruges, College of Europe.

⁵⁷ Donaldson, J. F., and Graham, S. (1999) ‘A model of college outcomes for adults’ *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol. 50(1), pp. 24–40.

⁵⁸ UNESCO (2009) *The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional synthesis report*. UNESCO, Paris.

⁵⁹ Fuwa, K. (2009) ‘Is the expansion of higher education in Japan for young students only or for all? A critical analysis from a lifelong learning perspective’ *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.28(4), pp. 459-471.

⁶⁰ Schuetze, H. G. and Slowey, M. (2002) ‘Participation and exclusion: a comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education’ *Higher Education*, vol.44, pp. 309-327.

⁶¹ Donaldson, J. F. and Townsend, B. K. (2007) ‘Higher education journals’ discourse about adult undergraduate students’ *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol.78(1), pp. 27-50.

⁶² Kasworm, C. E., Sandmann, L. R., and Sissel, P. A. (2000) ‘Adult learners in higher education’ In A. L. Wilson and E. R. Hays (eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 449–463). San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

⁶³ Kelly, M. (2004) ‘Lecturers’ perceptions of mature students in Institutes of Technology’ *The Irish Journal of Education*, vol.35, pp. 45-57.

⁶⁴ Kasworm, C. E. (2010) ‘Adult learners in a Research University: negotiating undergraduate student identity’ *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol.60(2), pp. 143-160. See also Merrill, B. (2001) ‘Learning and teaching in Universities: perspectives from adults learners and lecturers’ *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol.6(1), pp. 5-17.

⁶⁵ Schuetze, H. G. and Slowey, M. (2002) ‘Participation and exclusion: a comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education’ *Higher Education*, vol.44, pp. 309-327.

Lack of time is one of the main reasons for adults not to take-up HE and to drop out from HE, in particular in the case of females⁶⁶. Adequate **support mechanisms** such as childcare are also one of the most important factors to reduce the time constraints faced by adult students⁶⁷. Support structures available on campus need to be available beyond normal working hours (e.g. beyond 9am to 6pm). In other important aspects such as partner's support⁶⁸ (Winn 2002) there seems to be more difficulty for the introduction of relevant policy measures.

2.3.1.4 What kind of HEI and teaching?

Yamamoto⁶⁹ tried to summarise the organisational model of HE in the transition from traditional to lifelong learning:

Table 1: The organization of higher education –from traditional to lifelong learning

Traditional mode	Lifelong learning mode
Restricted access	Open access
Admission with academic credentials	Assessment of prior learning
For the young only	For young and adults
Undergraduate-centred	Wide range of programmes
Full-time studies	Full-time and part-time
On-site, campus based	Also off-campus and distance learning
Linear studies & final examinations	Module-based curriculum, credit system
Curriculum and discipline centred	Problem solving and competence based
Degree studies	Degree and non-degree studies
Focus on initial higher education	Includes continuing higher education
Non-diversified system of HE	Diversified HE system
What university did you attend?	What did you learn at university?

Source: From Yamamoto 2001

It is important to note that different types of HEIs contribute differently towards the trend of increasing levels of adult learning participation in programmes that led to a ISCED 5-6 qualification. In the UK post-1992 universities address with more attention than older universities adult students, in particular in the context of declining demographic trends⁷⁰ (cf. also Reichert and Smith 2009 for the case of France⁷¹) and tight competition for traditional students. This is sometimes seen as problematic for them as many institutions consider that adult students tend to have different motivations, interests, learning modes and responsibilities, challenging institutions to adapt their learning programmes and methods. This helps to explain why there is limited engaged with this target group from other institutions, in spite of the lifelong

⁶⁶ Dodgson, R. and Whitham, H. (2004) *Learner experience of foundation degrees in the North East of England: Access, support and retention*. Final report.

⁶⁷ KCPSE (2009) *Helping Adults succeed in postsecondary education: A policy framework*. Kentucky Council of Post-secondary Education.

⁶⁸ Winn, S. (2002) 'Student motivation: A socio-economic perspective' *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 27(4), pp. 445-457.

⁶⁹ Yamamoto, S. (2001). 'Changing society - changing universities? - Japanese Perspectives', in Schuetze, H.G. (ed.), *"And the Walls Came Tumbling Down" - Higher Education and Non-traditional Students*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, pp. 225-230.

⁷⁰ Reicherts, S. and Teixeira, P. (2009) 'Institutional diversity in English Higher Education' in Reichert, S. *Institutional diversity in European Higher Education. Tensions and challenges for policy-makers and institutional leaders*. EUA. Brussels.

⁷¹ Reichert, S. and Smith, J. (2009) 'Institutional diversity in French higher education' in Reichert, S. (2009) *Institutional diversity in European Higher Education. Tensions and challenges for policy-makers and institutional leaders*. EUA. Brussels.

learning rhetoric. Similarly, within institutions, continuing education activities are often appreciated but not counted as decisive factors for hiring professors in most environments⁷². However countries such as Switzerland and the UK some institutions or individual faculties may behave quite differently in this respect. Reichter refers as an example to the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland and also some Fachhochschulen in that country, where the continuing education offer is regarded as a key ingredient of the institutional profile so that the willingness and ability to teach mature professionals with their diverse perspectives and backgrounds is regarded as an essential hiring condition⁷³.

The Flash Eurobarometer 192 reports that almost 9 out of 10 teaching professionals working in universities in the EU agree that universities should open up to adult learners. However doing so would require substantial changes in teaching practices and new challenges with mixed student classrooms. HEI teaching staff have traditionally designed courses and employ teaching approaches, strategies and methods of assessment for students who are 18-22 years' old and have just completed secondary education. While lecturers recognise awareness of the specificities of adult learners, the growing number of such students in mainstream classes has been found to present unprecedented challenges for which little or no provision has been made in terms of staff development⁷⁴. Challenges include the tendency of adult students to be dominant in class discussions, some adult learners can be locked into a system of thinking, respond better to case-study work and worked examples and discussion rather than formal lectures. There is some evidence that lecturers do little in terms of modifying their practice substantially when adult students are present in their lectures, in particular in the hard sciences⁷⁵. Teaching practices that take into account adults need to change towards more formative facilitator role by the teacher, to adequately take into account adults' knowledge and experience. With adults, knowledge structuration also needs to take priority over knowledge creation. Similarly, assessment methods need to incorporate application of knowledge, continuous assessment, presentations, interviews and not focus only on traditional written examinations to reflect the capabilities and insights of adult students⁷⁶.

This may produce some conflicts with the needs of younger students: As a lecturer says 'in a sense you are pitching it to two very different audiences. It's a lot more work on those who are delivering it'⁷⁷, and very often there is very little support available in terms of how to teach adults effectively. Lecturers can find teaching adult students more intense and intellectual and mentally tiring experience⁷⁸. Adults can also be more demanding in terms of student support and less preoccupied with the stereotypes associated with it. On the whole, however, lecturers tend to agree that there professional and personal benefits in the teaching experience when adult learners are included.

⁷² Reichert, S. (2009) *Institutional diversity in European Higher Education. Tensions and challenges for policy-makers and institutional leaders*. EUA. Brussels.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Kelly, M. (2004) 'Lecturers' perceptions of mature students in Institutes of Technology' *The Irish Journal of Education*, vol.35, pp. 45-57.

⁷⁵ Merrill, B. (2001) 'Learning and teaching in Universities: perspectives from adults learners and lecturers' *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol.6(1), pp. 5-17.

⁷⁶ See also, for a fuller discussion, Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L., Adnett, N. and Slack, K. (2006) *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*. Higher Education Funding Council for England.

⁷⁷ Kelly, M. (2004) 'Lecturers' perceptions of mature students in Institutes of Technology' *The Irish Journal of Education*, vol.35, pp. 45-57.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

3 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS PROVIDERS OF ADULT LEARNING

3.1 Introduction

This section reports on the importance of the provision of adult learning for HEIs. It first reviews the number of adult learners in HE, before moving on to explore the link between this provision and qualifications. The section finishes with a review of the importance in terms of finances of adult learners for HEIs in Europe.

3.2 Adult learners in higher education institutions

After a strong HE expansion in the 1980s growth has moderated in recent years strongly. The number of students has started to increase much more moderately than in the last few decades during the last decade, as reported below in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of students in ISCED 5-6 in the EU (27 countries) and USA in '000

	2000	2003	2005	2007	Variation 07-00
EU	15,920.8	17,761.8	18,530.2	18,884.2	118%
USA	13,202.9	16,611.7	17,272.0	17,758.9	134%
Difference	2,717.9	1,150.1	1,258.2	1,125.3	

Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

The number of HE students in the EU has increased in the period 2000-2007. However, this increase has been much lower than in the late 1990s. The increase has also diminished as we come closer in time. The USA offers a contrasting situation in that growth in the number of HE students has been much stronger in the same period. Whereas the EU-27 had almost 3 million more students in HE courses than the US in 2000 in 2007 this figure was almost a third, just over 1 million.

Although the relationship between the size of the younger age cohorts and HE enrolment levels is complex given that it is mediated by factors such as enrolment rates and the duration of studies⁷⁹ demographic trends, with longer life expectancy and lower fertility rates also point towards the future importance of adult learning for future HEI growth⁸⁰.

As we have seen, the EU has argued for the centrality of lifelong-learning as a tool to achieve the Lisbon goals. Economic competitiveness is increasingly seen to require the continuous updating of knowledge and skills through life. More flexible career paths would also contribute to this trend, as people require re-training and re-skilling in their labour market transitions. In this context the importance of the lifelong learning function of HEIs could be expected to increase. This function is, however, not yet predominant. Creagh reports results of a survey of over 100 Universities in the EU, which show that almost 100 Universities considered the provision of skilled graduates

⁷⁹ OECD (2008) *Higher Education to 2030. Volume 1. Demography*. Paris, OECD.

⁸⁰ Kazis, R., Callahan, A., Davidson, C., McLeod, A., Bosworth, B., Choitz, V. and Hoops, J. (2007) *Adult learners in higher education: Barriers to success and strategies to improve results*. Employment and Training Occasional Paper 2007-03. Washington.

for labour market very important in their mission⁸¹. Almost 90 considered doctoral education and over 80 basic research and applied research as very important in their mission. Less than 40, however, considered lifelong learning as a very important part of their mission. This is more or less in line with the results obtained in the Trends V report⁸² and the BeFlex survey of Universities⁸³, in which around 50-55% of universities reported lifelong learning to be important for them, alongside with other priorities. In the same surveys 14-17% of universities considered lifelong learning their highest priority. As outlined below, the situation may differ for other types of HEIs than Universities, as non-University HEIs tend to give lifelong learning more importance.

Table 3 presents figures on the percentage of graduates at ISCED 5 and 6 aged 30 years and over, as a percentage of the total number graduates. This indicator gives an approximation to the level of adult learners in degree courses in HEIs. There are two technical aspects to note. First, these figures do not take into account the volume of adult students taking HE courses that do not lead to a degree. Second, in some countries with long degree cycles and high failure rates, such as Spain, the figures may include students who have not worked full time and are still reading for their first degree. As the Table shows, the proportion of adult graduates in HEIs is significant in some countries, reaching over 40% in Sweden, and over a third in a relatively high number of countries (Hungary, Slovenia, Finland). Yet, inter-country differences are very pronounced. In Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia and the Netherlands corresponding figures are below 15%. In most countries the proportion of adult students has increased in the period 2000-2007.

⁸¹ Creagh, I. (2009) *EUDIS: European Universities Diversifying Income Streams*. Presentation at the European Forum on Philanthropy and Research Funding 2009 Stakeholders' conference. London, 2-3.12.2009.

⁸² Crosier, D. , Purser, L. and Smidt, H. (2007) *Trends V: Universities shaping the higher education area* . EUA. Brussels.

⁸³ EUCEN (2009) *Progress on flexibility in the Bologna reform. Thematic report and recommendations to policy-makers*. Technical Report to the European Commission. EUCEN, Brussels.

Table 3: Graduates (ISCED 5-6) 30 years and over as a % of total graduates

	2000	2003	2005	2007	Difference 00-07
Belgium	:	7.0	6.0	6.8	N/A
Bulgaria	16.2	14.7	16.7	21.2	+5
Czech Rep	6.6	10.3	12.9	13.8	+7.2
Denmark	25.5	29.5	29.7	28.3	+2.8
Germany	21.4	19.5	18.5	17.0	-4.4
Estonia	:	:	:	28.2	N/A
Ireland	:	:	:	:	N/A
Greece	:	:	9.7	13.9	N/A
Spain	7.6	10.1	12.9	15.9	+8.3
France	:	:	:	:	N/A
Italy	15.0	24.9	22.3	23.8	+8.8
Cyprus	1.2	11.8	6.4	10.2	+9.0
Latvia	:	:	:	7.4	N/A
Lithuania	9.5	15.1	25.4	27.0	+17.5
Luxembourg	:	:	:	:	N/A
Hungary	27.3	27.3	31.7	32.8	+5.5
Malta	:	:	:	21.0	N/A
Netherlands	13.5	15.8	15.2	12.4	-1.1
Austria	17.9	20.1	15.7	22.3	+4.4
Poland	:	16.9	15.9	15.4	N/A
Portugal	22.0	27.3	24.1	23.2	+1.2
Romania	6.5	20.2	21.1	28.6	+22.1
Slovenia	35.4	36.3	39.1	39.4	+4
Slovakia	10.5	15.7	17.3	25.2	+14.7
Finland	33.4	33.0	34.2	33.8	+0.4
Sweden	37.2	40.6	42.4	41.6	+4.4
UK	28.9	32.2	31.2	29.5	+0.6

Source: Eurostat

Eurostat data is also available on the 85 centile age in tertiary education. This information is provided in Table 4. The age corresponding to centile 85 of a given population is the age separating the population into two groups: 85% of the population is aged less than that age and 15% of the population is aged more than that age. This average age has increased markedly in most European countries in the period 2000 to 2007. This means that more adult students are entering the higher education system (as already pointed out in Table 3), and probably also that adult students are entering higher education at a later point in life.

Table 4: Centile 85 age in tertiary education (ISCED 5-6)

	2000	2003	2005	2007	Difference 00-07
Belgium	25.1	26.2	26.9	26.6	1.5
Bulgaria	25.5	26.5	26.5	27.3	1.8
Czech Rep	25.0	27.1	28.1	29.2	4.2
Denmark	32.8	33.2	36.1	36.0	3.2
Germany	31.7	31.4	29.6	29.0	-2.7
Estonia	25.7	31.2	32.4	32.5	6.8
Ireland	26.0	26.8	27.4	29.9	3.9
Greece	21.0	25.2	29.2	30.5	9.5
Spain	26.6	27.9	29.1	30.8	4.2
France	24.8	25.5	25.7	25.5	0.7
Italy	27.2	28.2	28.9	29.4	2.2
Cyprus	21.6	23.6	24.9	25.8	4.2
Latvia	33.0	33.1	36.2	36.1	3.1
Lithuania	25.9	28.9	30.9	30.9	5.0
Luxembourg	:	:	:	:	N/A
Hungary	28.2	30.2	31.6	31.9	3.7
Malta	28.5	29.8	29.4	30.1	1.6
Netherlands	27.9	28.6	28.1	27.3	-0.6
Austria	34.9	31.3	31.1	31.5	-3.4
Poland	26.2	26.4	26.0	25.7	-0.5
Portugal	28.4	29.7	30.1	31.4	3.0
Romania	24.4	26.4	27.5	28.7	4.3
Slovenia	27.7	28.4	29.8	29.7	2.0
Slovakia	24.8	26.3	28.6	31.3	6.5
Finland	35.2	35.4	35.8	36.0	0.8
Sweden	37.8	39.1	39.0	39.2	1.4
UK	38.9	39.6	39.6	39.5	0.6

Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

An important question from a policy-making point of view is whether this learning relates to labour market participation or self-development. Eurostat data on the number of students aged 40 or older years who are following academic or occupationally oriented tertiary education courses reveals that the proportion of academic courses followed by these students in the EU-27 more than doubles the proportion of people following occupationally oriented courses. Moreover, the difference between the two categories has increased in the period 2000-2007 (from 1/1.96 to 1/2.56). This, however, cannot be taken as a sound indication of an increase in the cultural and social goals of adult education in HEIs as many academically oriented tertiary education courses have a labour market value.

Brandt, referring to the case of Norway highlights that there are few mature students (above the age of 30) in professional studies but that there are numerous mature students in 'open' Faculties of arts, social sciences and natural sciences⁸⁴. Thus, Brandt reports, a third of students were over the age of 30 in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Oslo in 1999. It has been noted that "senior" university courses illustrate the diversification of the educational offer⁸⁵. Many of these courses are of a "self-

⁸⁴ Brandt, E. (2001) 'Lifelong learning in Norwegian Universities' *European Journal of Education*, vol.36(3), pp. 265-276.

⁸⁵ Crosier, D. , Purser, L. and Smidt, H. (2007) *Trends V: Universities shaping the higher education area* . EUA. Brussels.

improvement” character and are targeted specifically at the over 55 year old or retired population. In the UK, by contrast, the top five subjects studied by full-time students aged 40-49 are subjects allied to medicine, education, social studies, business and administration studies and creative arts and design, some of which are clearly job-oriented⁸⁶.

What is possible to outline is that HEIs themselves have more than one purpose for lifelong learning, although job-related aspects dominate. According to the 2009 Beflex survey⁸⁷ 53% of Universities saw ‘responding to the employment needs of the labour market’ as the first purpose of lifelong learning, whereas 35% saw ‘stimulating personal development by providing personal development programmes for graduates’ as their first priority in relation to lifelong learning. ‘Meeting the needs of citizens in all aspects of life –cultural, economic, social, professional’ (31%) and ‘encouraging participation of non-traditional learners attracting new groups into the university’ (27%) were in between those two aspects.

In the next subsection we review the link between adult HE participation and the award of qualifications.

3.3 Outputs: Adult learners and higher education qualifications

3.3.1 The link to qualifications

Mainstream HE provision is linked to the award to HE qualifications –see section on funding below. Moreover, HE lifelong learning is becoming more integrated with initial learning, according to around three quarters of Universities⁸⁸, accentuating the link between provision and qualifications. Part of this can be related to the availability of public funding for credited HE offer. The ‘adult’ professional offer can however be separated in some cases from the mainstream offer. Two possible ways to integrate CPD courses with mainstream HE provision can be identified: first a ‘building up’ model in which short CPD courses could be aggregated by recognition of prior learning into a HE qualification; and second a ‘dividing up’ model, in which an existing HE programme might be broken down into units useable in different training environments.

Regarding post-graduate offer, Austria and Finland have been highlighted as examples of countries where HEIs have dedicated adult education units, which are removed from the Master Delivery points⁸⁹. Such approach is also employed in the UK whereby adult students can decide to study for a ‘Continuing professional development’ (CPD) unit offered by a HEI, instead of a part-time MA unit. The risk for HEI is with adult students reading an MA unit and then not completing the assignment, therefore counting as a ‘drop-out’ in University statistics –cf. above in this report. Such separation is, however, sometimes artificial in the sense that the content of the CPD unit and the MA unit can be exactly the same. Differences are more to do with costs and organisation of the delivery. Other times the CDP unit can be substantially different to the mainstream offer and ‘customised’. When this is the case units are often completed without links with each other, and with no possibility of credit accumulation. In Germany a ‘lifelong learning’ Master is normally designated as

⁸⁶ Universities UK (2010) *Active Ageing and Universities: Engaging older learners*. London, Universities UK.

⁸⁷ EUCEN (2009) *Progress on flexibility in the Bologna reform. Thematic report and recommendations to policy-makers*. Technical Report to the European Commission. EUCEN, Brussels.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

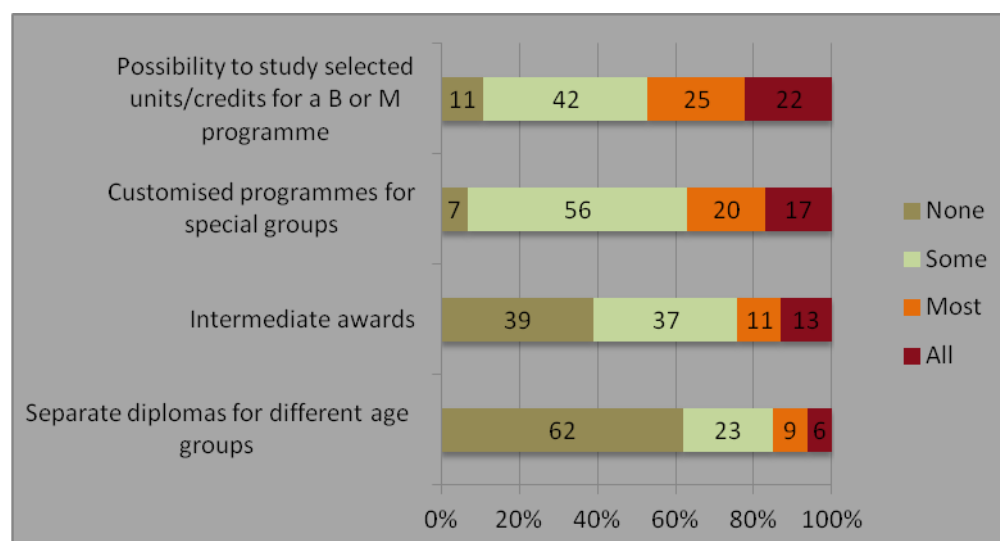
⁸⁹ Davies, H. (2009) *Survey of Master Degrees in Europe*. EUA. Brussels.

such and commands high tuition fees⁹⁰. These run parallel but isolated from government-subsidised programmes for full-time students, which charge lower fees.

The second Beflex survey⁹¹ reported a proliferation of Master programmes designed to have immediate professional application and targeting particular professional groups in the last few years. On the other hand, the diversity of format, delivery mode, duration and designation, was wide enough to prompt concern 'that the value of a masters diploma may be called into question'. This raises issues about how to ensure that all Masters have an equal value.

EUCEN⁹² surveyed the programmes offered to support adult learning. Amongst these were the possibility to study selected units/ credits for Bachelor or Master programmes, customized programmes for special groups, intermediate awards and the provision of separate diplomas for different age groups. While these possibilities are open for all courses in only a minority of Universities, most Universities offer them to some extent, in particular the first two. EUCEN data suggests, however, that much is yet to be done in this area.

Chart 3: Programmes offered to support lifelong learning students



Source: EUCEN 2009.

Around two thirds of the Universities EUCEN surveyed offered more than 30 individual short courses (5-50 hours) and more than 30 course units for lifelong learning. Separate offer is more frequent at the post-graduate level⁹³. A potential problem is that quality assurance for non-credited courses can be less elaborated⁹⁴.

3.3.2 Who obtains qualifications: One step up?

An important aspect is whether adult participation in HE leads adults to the achievement of HE qualifications that they lacked before. The following Charts provide information on adult new entrants into HE (ISCED level 5A) as a proportion of all new entrants. The Charts cover selected European countries, for which good data

⁹⁰ Davies, H. (2009) *Survey of Master Degrees in Europe*. EUA. Brussels.

⁹¹ EUCEN (2009) *Progress on flexibility in the Bologna reform. Thematic report and recommendations to policy-makers*. Technical Report to the European Commission. EUCEN, Brussels.

⁹² Ibid.

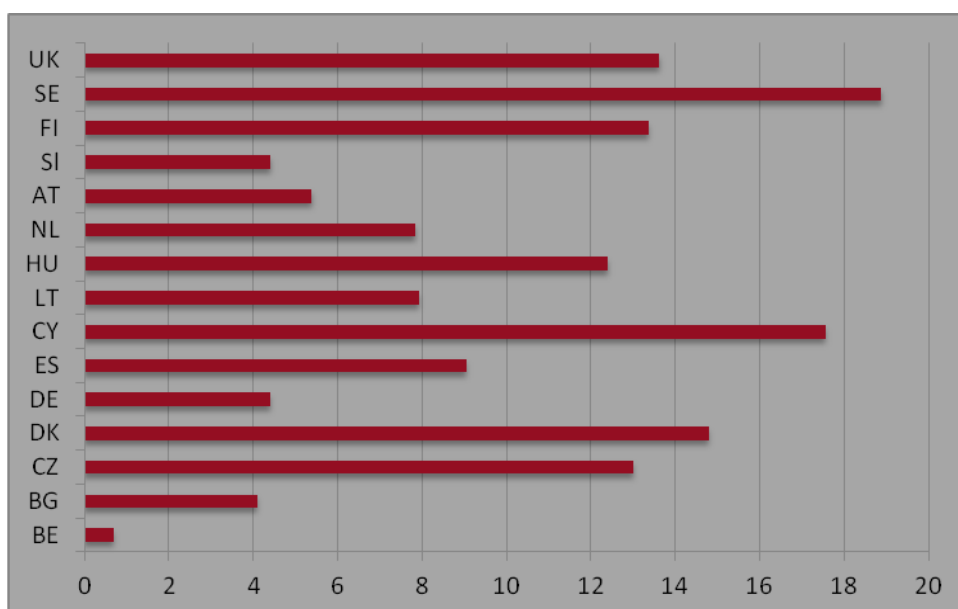
⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Brandt, E. (2001) 'Lifelong learning in Norwegian Universities' *European Journal of Education*, vol.36(3), pp. 265-276.

series are available from Eurostat. New entrants to a level of education refers to students who are entering any programme leading to a recognised qualification at this level of education for the first time, irrespective of whether the students enter the programme at the beginning or at an advanced stage of the programme. Individuals who are returning to study at a level following a period of absence from studying at that same level are not considered to be new entrants. It is necessary to also point out that foreign students who are enrolling for the first time in the country for which the data are reported are counted as new entrants, regardless of their previous education in other countries.

Chart 4 shows that in some countries such as Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Sweden and the UK those over 30 make up for well over 10% of new entrants into higher education. Therefore, in those countries, adults are going in large proportions into HE as 'one step up', to obtain a HE qualification for the first time. By contrast, in Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany and Slovakia the proportion of adult students new into HE is below 5%.

Chart 4: New entrants into ISCED 5a courses aged 30 or above as a proportion of all new entrants (2007)

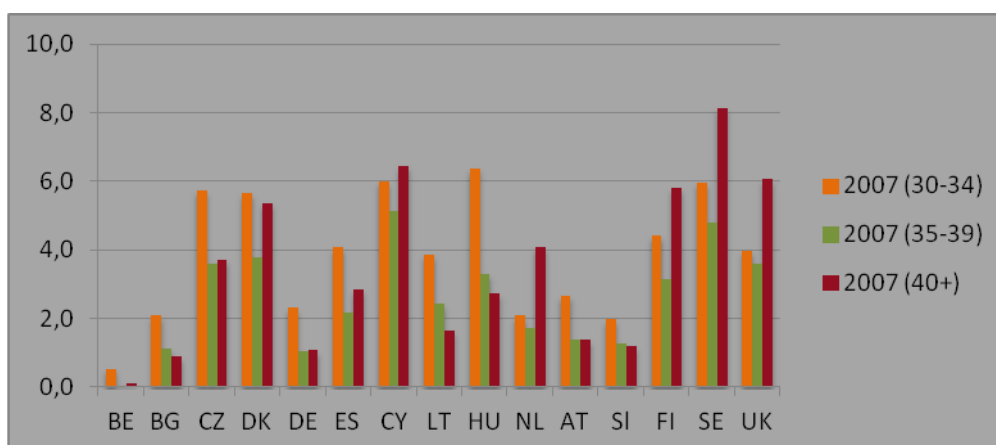


Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

The breakdown provided in Chart 5 suggests that many of the new entrants into HE are above the age of 40. This group makes up for the highest proportion of adult new entrants into HE in Cyprus, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. In the Czech Republic, Hungary and Spain by contrast, most adult new entrants are in the group 30-34. This would reflect that there are different approaches to engaging in HE in these countries vis-à-vis other European countries. Universities UK⁹⁵ note that participation, however, declines strongly after the age of 50.

⁹⁵ Universities UK (2010) *Active Ageing and Universities: Engaging older learners*. London, Universities UK.

Chart 5: New adult entrants into ISCED 5A courses as a proportion of all entrants, by age group (2007)



Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

The next sub-section reflects on the funding derived from the offer of HE to adults.

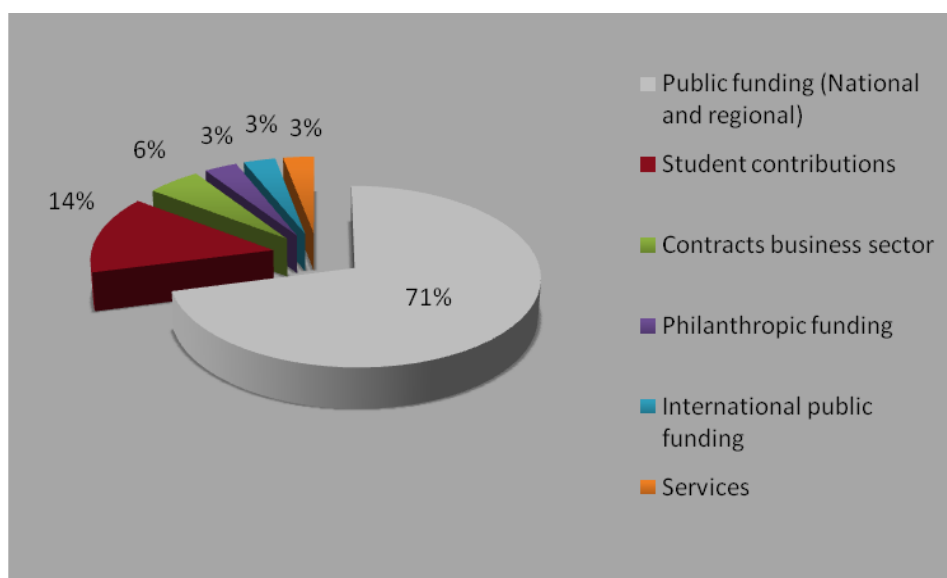
3.4 Funding from adult learning provision

Almost all European countries use funding formulas to calculate the size of public grants to HEIs for teaching and/or ongoing operational activity and, in certain cases, research. The funding formulas that are used to allocate funds to institutions are usually based on the volume of activities, which is frequently measured as the number of students enrolled at the institution weighted according to the field of study⁹⁶. Although this can be complemented with other input criteria such as number of staff, and performance indicators, the proportion of students over 30 years of age can give an indication of the share of funding HEIs may receive for the education of the adult students they enrol in ISCED level 5 and 6. There is less data on the revenue generated outside these courses. Creagh⁹⁷, using UEA-EUDIS data that refers to over 100 European Universities in 27 countries, reports that around 71% of their funding came from national and regional public sources⁹⁸. An additional 14% came from students contributions. The other funding sources reported were around or below 5%.

⁹⁶ EURYDICE (2008) *Higher education governance in Europe: policies, structures, funding and academic staff*. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission.

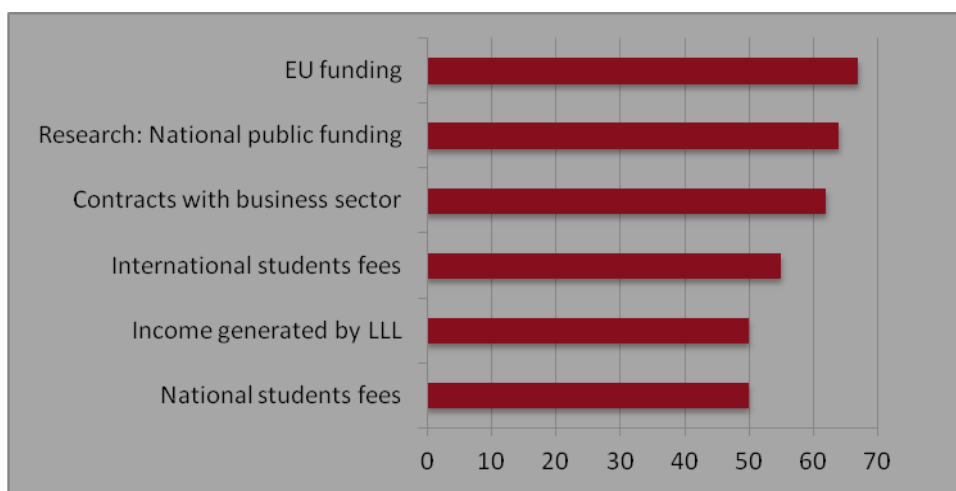
⁹⁷ Creagh, I. (2009) *EUDIS: European Universities Diversifying Income Streams*. Presentation at the European Forum on Philanthropy and Research Funding 2009 Stakeholders' conference. London, 2-3.12.2009.

⁹⁸ See also EURYDICE (2008) *Higher education governance in Europe: policies, structures, funding and academic staff*. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission.

Chart 6: Funding sources EU Universities

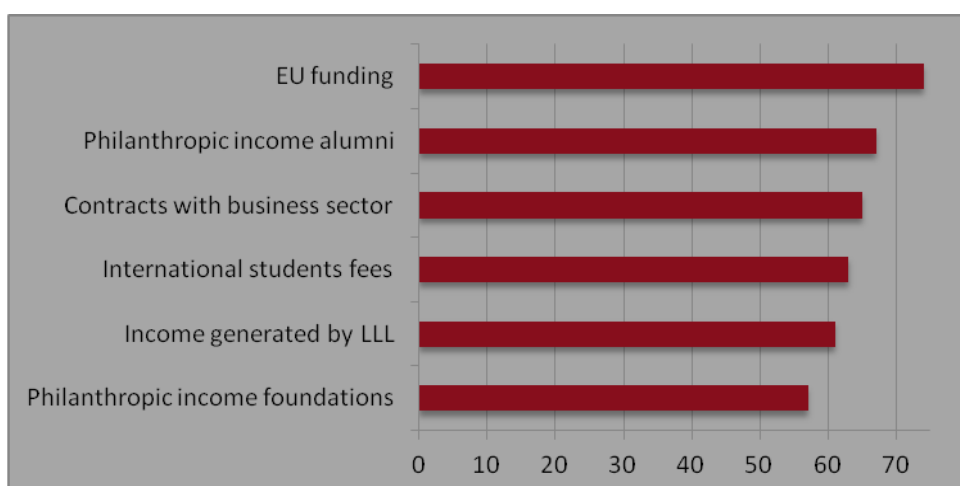
Source: UEA EUDIS survey (2009)

Around half of the Universities that replied to the EUA-EUDIS survey reported that their income from lifelong learning activities had increased over the last five years. This is below the corresponding figures for EU funding and national research funding, contracts with the business sector and international students' fees, but it is still a very high proportion. The figures unfortunately do not report on the extent of the increase.

Chart 7: Perception of income streams evolution over the last 5 years

Source: UEA EUDIS survey (2009). Percentage of Universities expecting increase

Equally significant, lifelong learning activities are also one of the sources from which a high proportion of Universities expect increasing revenues in the near future. Over 60% of the respondents to the UEA-EUDIS survey expected to increase their funding from such activities in the near future.

Chart 8: Sources of funding expected to increase in the near future

Source: UEA EUDIS survey (2009). Percentage of Universities expecting increase

In terms of cost-sharing a UK study⁹⁹ reports that public finance for adult education is focused on those with a low level of educational attainment. Those with HE qualifications are more likely to have to finance their studies themselves and must study in their own time.

⁹⁹ Powell, R., Smith, R. and Reakes, A. (2003) *Defining common issues across Europe for adult education*. Slough, National Foundation for Educational Research.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

As required in the Terms of Reference, the **final aim** of the report is to provide recommendations for future studies in this area identifying suitable questions to ask/ can be studied. The review offered above outlines the contribution of adult learning to HE and offers substantive information on key issues affecting adult learners' participation in HE. In light of this review, several recommendations for future studies can be outlined. These are presented below.

The benefits and costs of adult participation in higher education for HEIs

The level of adult education participation in higher education is important and it is likely to increase in the near future. The motivations of and the costs and benefits for individual learners have been the object of a number of studies. Similarly, the benefits for HEIs, in terms of additional revenues for adults' participation in HE are, even if not fully quantified, evident. However, HEIs are not only motivated by financial aspects. In this respect, the incentives, benefits (e.g. why should HEIs reach out to adults/ What potential benefits can they bring to HEIs?) and costs (e.g. we know validation of non-formal and informal learning can enhance access by adults and is a political demand, but also that many HEIs do not implement validation procedures, but more evidence is needed on the reasons why they don't) to HEIs of providing mainstream and targeted HE programmes for adult learners are recommended as a potential area for future research. This can take the form of case studies in a selection of HEIs with different missions –it is understood that the European Commission is currently working on a typology of HEIs. The audience for this research would mainly be HEIs that are not heavily involved in the education of adult learners.

Adult learners and quality in higher education

Such research could also shed light on how adult learner participation in HE is linked to quality. Related to this issue is the recognition of such link, and ongoing exercises to measure HE quality by the Commission. It is further recommended that liaison is undertaken with EAC's unit in charge of the management of the current project on a Multi-dimensional global university ranking to explore the possibility of including the proportion of adult learners in HEIs as part of the ranking indicators, given the contribution that adults are likely to make to HE quality, deep learning styles, innovation and links with the productive sector.

Working for access: Best practices

There is a good understanding of the range of measures that help to adult learners' participation in higher education. Studies that identify and disseminate good practices on those (e.g. the validation of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance procedures for new adult education courses and the development of guidance and counselling as well as the improvement of dissemination materials in HEI's websites) could benefit those institutions who have *already* decided to be active in the provision of education to adult learners.

Informing yesterday's students about today's higher education

What is unclear in relation to adult learners is the extent to which they are aware of recent changes in European education systems. These changes (such as changes in pedagogical methods, the shift to learning outcomes, the Bologna process, etc.) may

have amounted to a significant transformation of educational provision from the time in which today's adults attended school. Further research is required on the extent to which adults are aware of recent changes, and how better understanding of these could affect their educational decisions.

Financial support: enabling access, but how?

Three main factors were noted in this pre-study in relation to financial constraints. First, the constraints on many financial support schemes based on age; second, gaps in many support systems for part-time and distance learning students; third, the impact of loan schemes, in particular those that do not make repayment conditional on higher income after completion of studies. Future research could map the extent to which these gaps are prevalent in the EU and the strength of information, advice and guidance systems to provide financial advice to potential adult students. This would clarify priority areas for policy action regarding this important issue.

Pedagogy: moving from effectiveness to efficiency

Regarding pedagogy, there is a good understanding of the type of learning that in inductive to good adult learner performance. The issue in our view is now to do with time-efficiency in the learning process, given that time constraints are a crucial barrier for adult learners. In this respect, studies on effective pedagogical practices (for residential, online and blended provision) to reduce study time and minimise time wastage without compromising academic standards/ learning outcomes and the learning of younger students would be of substantial interest. Such piece of research could also start to expose the HE staff training and professional development needs before they can implement such pedagogical practices.

Enhancing data availability for the future

It is also noted that currently only some US States (e.g. Florida) employment and educational data is linked at the individual level and longitudinally, so that individual trajectories can be mapped while in education and outside education, to measure the employment and learning outcomes of adult education provision. The feasibility of establishing such an approach in Europe would benefit the research potential in this area.